

**Hearing by the
House Resources Committee
Subcommittee on
Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans
On Six Draft NOAA Authorization Bills
May 16, 2002**

Members Present: Gilchrest (R/MD), Chairman, Underwood (D/Guam), Ranking Member, Saxton (R/NJ), Faleomavaega (D/AS).

Witness: Scott Gudes, Deputy Under Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere

Opening Statements: Each member submitted a statement for the record, and Mr. Underwood also submitted a statement for Rep. Pallone (D/NJ).

Synopsis of Testimony:

NOAA appreciates the subcommittee's interest in maintaining the agency's authority and capability to provide a strong basis for scientific decision-making, and welcomes clarification of the roles and responsibilities of the four line offices covered in the set of bills. However, NOAA reserves final judgment on the specific organizational changes the bills would make pending release of the results of the NOAA Program Review initiated by VADM Lautenbacher, and the report of the Ocean Commission.

The bills seek to clarify authorities regarding funding mechanisms including grants, contracts and cooperative agreements. It is essential to NOAA that the final language on funding mechanisms be flexible and efficient, to best support agency operations.

NOAA needs an agency-wide authority to develop an integrated and coordinated education program, and urges the subcommittee to authorize NOAA to establish a training and education center.

NOAA urges the subcommittee to explicitly authorize the Coastal America Partnership Program.

NOAA appreciates the draft legislation's provisions that support NOAA's role in global coastal and ocean observation and monitoring. However, NOAA prefers to defer comments on the specific provisions until the release of the ocean observing system report being prepared by the National Ocean Research Leadership Council.

While NOAA supports reauthorization of the HSIA, the agency has concerns about some of the specific amendments included in the draft reauthorization bill. In particular, quality assurance requirements could result in liability exposure and increased workload to respond to litigation, as well as impinging on the Coast Guard's maritime safety responsibilities.

NOAA supports the draft bill to revise and modernize the laws governing the NOAA Commissioned Officer Corps.

NOAA generally supports most provisions of the draft bill authorizing the Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research, but defers specific comments pending completion of the NOAA Program Review.

NOAA would like to work with the subcommittee to ensure that the proposed NMFS

authorization bill enables NOAA to comprehensively manage living marine resources and their essential habitat.

Questions Asked of Witness, and Members' comments: Members' questions and comments, and DUS Gudes' responses are paraphrased or summarized below.

Gilchrest:

Q – When do you expect the results of the NOAA bottom-up review to be available, so they can be considered as this legislation moves forward?

A - The review is done, and now ready for NOAA, Commerce and OMB review, and I can't really predict how long that will take, but I assure you we'll keep you informed of progress.

Q – Do you have language to propose to support NOAA's education mission?

A – Now we operate under several program-specific authorities, and we would prefer a coordinated program across all programs and offices. We will be pleased to discuss this with the subcommittee as the legislation moves ahead.

Q – Is the bottom-up review looking at fishery management, use of industry boats for stock assessments, and such?

A – The review is focused more on NOAA-wide corporate management issues than on specific line offices, so it would not get into those issues.

Gilchrest comment – We will be happy to consider the results of the review before markup of this legislation, and to work with NOAA to provide the authorities needed to carry out the agency's missions effectively and efficiently.

Underwood:

Q – Shouldn't NURP be explicitly authorized in this legislation?

A – I believe it's incorporated into the Ocean Exploration authorization provisions. NURP and OE are really inter-related, and NURP Centers carry out some of the OE program's projects.

Q – How can NOAA best use the results of the bottom-up review, and those of the Ocean Commission and Pew Trust?

A – We believe all of those efforts will be helpful in formulating decisions on how to proceed into the future and make NOAA the best agency possible.

Q – Does NOAA use its hurricane tracking aircraft to also study typhoons? There are 60-70 major storms annually in the Western Pacific.

A – We're continuing to look into how to address that concern. Aircraft time allocation is a very difficult issue.

Saxton comment: Agrees that the current draft is not adequate for NURP, and needs to be

clarified. **Faleomavaega:** Agrees with Mr. Saxton. **Gilchrest response:** The subcommittee will work with interested Members and NOAA to be sure NURP is addressed appropriately.

Gilchrest comments: The \$14 million authorized, may not be enough for the Ocean Exploration program. NOAA should move with “all deliberate speed” on the bottom-up review, to be able to assist the subcommittee with the legislation before markup.

Faleomavaega:

Q – Why doesn’t the Hawaii tsunami warning center consider the island territories? Now it only provides warnings for the coastal states.

A – I’m pretty sure our centers in Hawaii and Alaska, and our international partners, do cover all of the islands. If I am not correct on this, we will get back to you with more information.

Q – I urge NOAA to continue to support serious research on global warming.

A – Climate change and global warming research are among NOAA’s highest priorities.

Q – Do the NURP and Ocean Exploration efforts address the deep ocean trenches of the Western Pacific?

A – The programs are not limited to the U.S. EEZ, but the available equipment is probably not suited to such great depths.

Q – Are we less advanced than Japan on ocean research?

A – I can’t fully respond to that, but it’s true that some of our equipment such as submersibles is old, and there has not been much recent U.S. investment in ocean research technology.

Q – Does the Navy have the best, most modern, submersible technology?

A – I’ll have to get back to you for the record on that.

Gilchrest:

Q – When will we see a plan for a global ocean observing system?

A – We expect the interagency effort to produce a draft in June, and hope it will be ready for public review by approximately late summer.

Closing Gilchrest comments – We’ll be glad to work with NOAA to try and frame legislation that will support the various on-going reviews. We appreciate your time, and this subcommittee strongly supports NOAA.